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"Compton's Cafeteria was the center of the universe for us."

The only way that they could make money is by selling drugs or selling themselves, because they wouldn't hire us because we were too feminine. You couldn't work in San Francisco because a lot of people would be jealous and out you. You know what I mean?

Compton's Cafeteria was the center of the universe for us. It was a place where we could make sure that we had lived through the night. It was like a society club—it was a cheap food, cheap coffee, cheap breakfast. Windows on both sides on one corner of Taylor Street and the other corner of Turk Street was nothing but windows. You could see who was coming in, who was coming out, and who was there and who wasn't. A lot of times, Compton's was a revolving door.

People came in, did what they did; if they liked it, they stayed, if not, they went about their business to

another state or back home or wherever, because a lot of the kids that came into the Tenderloin at the time was kids who were thrown out. And a lot of the kids came from broken homes. The kids came to start a new identity and a new life and forget about the past. A lot of times we didn't know where they came from or their real names, because as soon as they came into the Tenderloin, they would change their names. Like Gypsy or Greta, or Vicky, or Alexis.

So then I went back to San Jose, and I had just broken up with my lover and I told my mother I was gonna run away and she would never see me again. And then I just said, "Well, you know something? I'm going to join the military."

I joined the US Navy in 1964. I lowered my voice, I played the role of an Academy Award winner, okay? I decided if the military doesn't make me a man, nothing will. And it didn't. I went into the boot camp in San Diego, then I was stationed at Coronado, and then they were asking for volunteers to go to Vietnam. Then I

said, "Oh, there's more money." And I was [a] scared little sissy, but I volunteered to go to Vietnam. Not only because of that; because this is the only way that I could prove to my family that I was a man.

And another thought behind my head: If I got killed, I would become a hero to my family. And it was important to make my mother proud, because I hadn't made her proud before, because she knew what I was. She never said anything; she never turned against me or anything. But I still wanted to make my mother proud.

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So, one day, I was in Da Nang, Vietnam, and I was working unloading cargo from freezer ships where they had all the freezers in the bottom of the boat, and you would come up. And then one day I thought, "Oh my God. I've had enough. I am not going to do this. I've put myself through hell, and I will not put myself through hell anymore." I went to my priest and told him that I was gay. I went to my commander and told him I was gay. They put me in the "brick," whatever they call it. And they interrogated me, then they sent me back

- The clerk was Amanda was a transgender woman who look out for us.